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ABSTRACT

Higher education enrollment is going through a transition. Between 1992 and 1998, the enrollment growth rate has been nearly flat, but the National Center for Education Statistics now projects that enrollment will increase by 1.4% annually during the next decade. Not every college and university will realize this growth. The traditional college age group will increase, and increases in the enrollment of younger students will offset some of the declines in the enrollment of older students. Institutions that serve younger students will experience more growth than those serving older students. Growth in enrollment will be uneven among the states, and institutions in the middle of the country are expected to have lower growth than those on the coasts. Nine states are projected to have at least a 20% increase in high school graduates over the decade, and 19 states are expected to experience a decline in the number of high school graduates. Factors other than demographics that are expected to affect enrollment are: (1) the possibility that the acceleration in the number of women entering college may slow; (2) the increasing demand for education; and (3) the supply of college classroom seats. Demographic projections suggest a mixed future for college and university enrollment, but the continuing economic advantages that accrue to employees with a college education may offset negative pressures on enrollment. (SLD)

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Update

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Enrollment Projections

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Update

Enrollment Projections

Higher education enrollment is going through a transition. According to the U. S. Department of Education *Projections of Education Statistics to 2010*[1], we have experienced a nearly flat annual enrollment growth rate of 0.2 percent between 1992 and 1998. That marked a decline from a robust 2.4 percent annual growth rate between 1985 and 1992. NCES projects that enrollment will increase by 1.4 percent annually during the next decade. This is more than the steady-state enrollment of the last few years, but not as much growth as we experienced in the late 1980s. In 1998 14.6 million students were enrolled in postsecondary institutions. That number will increase by 2.9 million students to 17.5 million by 2010. If we assume that one faculty member is needed for each 250 students, the number of higher education faculty will need to increase by 11,600 by 2010.

Not every college and university will realize en-

Table 1--Red are 4-year enrollments, blue are 2-year enrollments

PROJECTED ENROLLMENT BY 2 AND 4-YEAR INSTITUTIONS

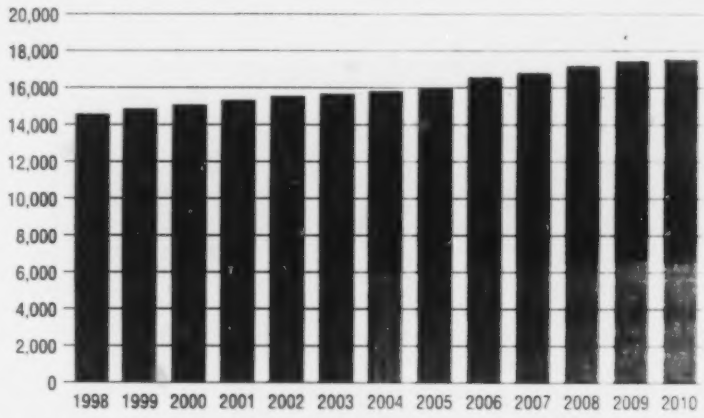
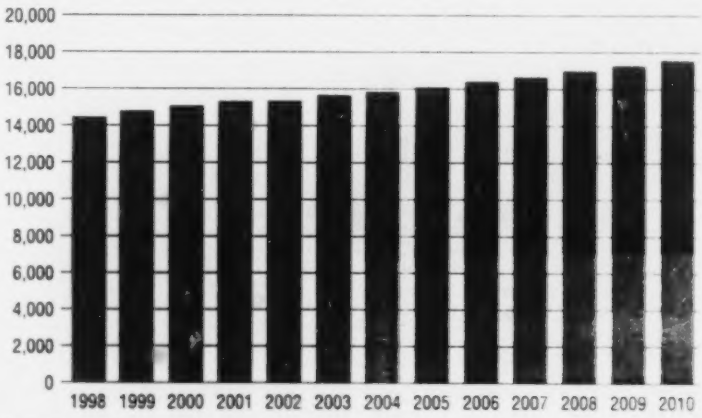


Table 2--Red is full-time, blue is part-time

PROJECTED ENROLLMENT BY PART AND FULL-TIME UNDERGRADUATES



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rollment growth during the next decade. In part, this can be explained by the changing age composition of the population. The traditional college age group—18 to 24—will increase by 18 percent between 1998 and 2010. At the same time, the number of 25 to 29 year olds will increase, but only by 7 percent, and those aged 30 to 34 will decrease by 6 percent. These new students in the younger group are the offspring of baby-boom parents. The increases in the enrollment of younger students will offset some of the loss caused by declines in the enrollment of older students.

Institutions that serve younger students will experience more growth than those serving older students. The corollary expectation is that the number of full-time students will increase faster than part-time enrollment. That would be a reversal of the experience of the 1980's when part-time enrollment grew more rapidly than full-time enrollment. If this is true, community colleges that enroll a large share of older part-time students may experience less growth than four-year schools with more traditional age students.

Geographic Differences

Growth in enrollment will be uneven among the states. The best available measure of potential college enrollment growth is the number of high school graduates expected in each state over the decade. The number of high school graduates is expected to rise by 20 percent in the West, 11 percent in the Northeast, 13 percent in the South and 4 percent in the Midwest. By this measure states in the middle of the nation will have lower growth than those on the coasts. The exceptions to this are Louisiana and Mississippi in the South and Maine in the North; all three are states that are expected to graduate fewer students from high school in 2010 than they do now.

Nine states are expected to have at least a 20 percent increase in the number of high school graduates over the decade. They are:

Nevada	79%
Arizona	48%
North Carolina	31%
Florida	28%
Colorado	23%
Georgia	23%
Connecticut	23%
California	22%
Massachusetts	21%

Eighteen states are expected to have a declining number of high school graduates between now and 2010. Declines go from over 30 percent in Washington, D.C. to almost breakeven in the bottom five states on the list.

Washington, D.C.	31%
South Dakota	28%
North Dakota	23%
Wyoming	19%
West Virginia	13%
Montana	13%
Louisiana	10%
Maine	8%
Nebraska	7%
Vermont	4%
Iowa	4%
Mississippi	2%
Oklahoma	2%
Kansas	1%
Arkansas	1%
Ohio	1%
Utah	1%
Wisconsin	1%

Some of these states, such as Washington, D.C. and Utah, import students from other states, so the decline in high school graduates will not be as important on enrollment as will be the case in those states that do not import students.

Most of the national growth in enrollment will be concentrated in a few states.

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The remaining states will show modest levels of growth or decline in the number of high school graduates in the next decade.

Other Considerations

Factors other than demographics influence college enrollment. Over the last 25 years, colleges have experienced a major increase in the enrollment of women. One factor that may lead to slower growth than predicted is the possibility that the acceleration in the number of women entering college may slow as women now represent nearly 60 percent of entering undergraduates.

The second factor that might change rates of enrollment is the increasing demand for education. As more jobs require college level skills, an increasing number of students may prepare to seek a college education. This is tempered by the fact that the college going rate has been increasing to the point that nearly two-thirds of high school graduates attend college within two years of leaving high school. If the trend continues, we may need to think about college as a universal part of everyone's educational experience. A countervailing factor that may dampen demand for college is increase in tuition, which keeps rising faster than income. This growing financial barrier may be an especially difficult issue for lower-income citizens who may find that college costs, even with student aid, are too high to afford.

The third factor that can influence enrollment is the supply of college classroom seats. States do not seem to be willing to invest in the facilities necessary to enroll these new students. In the 1960s when the baby-boomers were enrolling in college, we built a new campus a week. The buildings necessary to enroll the children of the baby-boomers are not being built.

California, as an example, is expecting 714,000 new students in public colleges by 2010[2]. This is a 36 percent increase from the current enrollment. The question is whether California, and other growth states, will make the investments necessary to provide access to this new generation of college students. It would take 24 new colleges enrolling 30,000 students each to meet the expected demand in California alone. It may be that the states with the most growth are not willing to make the commitment of public funds to meet the surging demand. They appear to believe that a combination of on-line resources and temporary classrooms will be adequate as short-term resolutions to a long-term problem. New for-profit colleges may spring up to meet the demand that goes unmet by existing public and private institutions. This is not good news for full-time faculty members, because so many of these institutions depend almost wholly on part-time faculty.

Sam Kipp points out[3] that the pool of college applicants will be more ethnically diverse than today. The greatest growth will be among those populations that are most likely to drop out of school and less likely to attend college. These changes in the nature of the new generation of potential college students suggest that these projections may result in lower enrollment rates than NCES is reporting.

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Summary

The demographic projections suggest a mixed future at best. Some states and regions of the country will face a boom in college enrollment at the same time other states will have excess college space as the number of high school graduates declines. Some of the social and economic considerations suggest a more somber future in which rising college prices, lagging educational preparation among students, and too few classrooms may combine to dampen enrollment in the future. The continuing economic advantages that accrue to employees with college level education may offset these negative pressures on enrollment

ENDNOTES

[1] Projections of Education Statistics to 2010, National Center for Education Statistics, Washington D.C. (www.nces.ed.gov/pubs2000/projections)

[2] California Postsecondary Education Commission press release (www.cpec.ca.gov/pressrelease/press092099.asp)

[3] Kipp, Sam, "Demographic Trends and Their Impact on the Future of the Pell Grant Program." *Memory, Reason, Imagination: A Quarter Century of Pell Grants*. Edited by Lawrence Gladieux and Watson Scott Swail. The College Board, 1998, Washington, D.C.

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